

#### GREEN

# How Do You Make Republicans Care About Animal Testing? Anthony Bellotti Has A Plan

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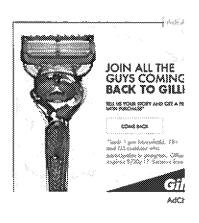


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Anthony Bellotti's day lob is working as a Republican strategist specializing in opposition research, with clients that have included Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's re-election campaign, anti-Obamacare efforts and various pro-life campaigns.

"But by night I advocate for animals trapped in the government's taxpayerfunded experimentation laboratories," he says. "Ending forced taxpayerfunded animal experimentation is my life's work. It's my calling. It's what gets me out of bed in the morning, it's the first thing I think about when I wake up and the last thing I think about when I go to sleep."

A few years ago, Beliotti merged these two paths with White Coat Waste, a nonprofit whose aim is making folks on the right care about the estimated 25 million vertebrates used every year in U.S.-based laboratories — many in



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horrific-sounding experiments, many of which are funded with taxpayer dollars.

How many dollars? Bellotti estimates at least \$12 billion in tax funding per year goes toward animal testing, PETA puts the figure at over \$16 billion.

One of White Coat Waste's projects is advocating for more transparency in the federal budget, so it will be clearer how much money is actually at issue.

The Huffington Post recently caught up with Beliatti by email to find out more about how and why he intends to get right-leaning political animals involved in this fight.

#### The Huffington Post: What prompted you to start White Coat Waste?

Anthony Bellotti: Back in 1995, between junior and senior year of high school, I worked as an intern in an animal experimentation laboratory in New York City. For eight weeks I watched horrifying experiments on animals that you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. I witnessed, first hand, the harsh reality of modern animal experimentation, up close and personal, on pigs, primates, beagles, rabbits and smaller animals.

At 17, I didn't know anything about wasteful government spending on these experiments. I just knew that something was wrong with this picture.

The experience immediately and forever changed my life, in fact, I remember saying to myself: "If this is one of the good animal laboratories, what the heck are they doing in the bad ones?" it was a horrifying experience — talk about shock and awe — but it was also the best thing that ever happened to me because it changed me so profoundly.

# Why are taxpayer-funded animal experiments a problem? What arguments do you use with people on the right to make your case?

It's a problem because the government's secretive and out-of-control animal experimentation budget forces you to pay for something that you don't like, don't need and doesn't work. We can save lives and money by cutting wasteful government spending that funds animal abuse. There are better things to waste your money on than cruel and unnecessary animal experiments.

Fortunately, the science has moved entirely in our direction in recent years, and is proving that experiments on animals have largely been a miserable failure. But don't take my word for it; even the FDA admits that 92 percent of all drugs tested successfully on animals will fail in humans. 92 percent! If NASA had a 92 percent failure rate, we'd shut the program down stat.

Look, there's a reason you don't go to the veterinarian when you are sick; animals and humans are different. And when you do get sick, there's also a reason why your doctor doesn't call the "white coats" in the monkey lab asking them how to treat you.

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What happens to animals in a laboratory is not relevant information to a medical doctor — a real doctor, not a taxpayer-funded college professor in a lab — you know, someone who actually treats patients.

Besides, if you don't support "socialized medicine," why on earth would you support socialized "medical research?" And even if you support animal experimentation in principle, do you really want to pay for it with higher taxes?

# Why are you focusing on bringing your message to folks on the right? Are you also working with people and groups on the left?

This absolutely must be a bipartisan issue. So we are working with, and taking our message to, folks on both the left and right. Concern for animals is not a left/right issue; it's a matter of mercy and justice. These are values espoused by each side of the aisle, and our message deeply resonates with people and groups on all sides.

We focus on center-right outreach because taxpayer-funded animal experimentation is a big government program. And if someone thinks big government programs are inherently inefficient, ineffective and wasteful, then they must also question the government's \$12 billion annual animal experimentation budget.

White Coat Waste is the only organization reaching out to mainstream audiences and center-right, conservative-leaning folks about animal experimentation precisely because we're a taxpayer watchdog. Our message is crystal clear: spending is the problem. And we're the only taxpayer-watchdog attacking the root cause of animal experimentation: wasteful government spending.

#### What's your overall goal? Do you have incremental goals?

White Coat Waste wants to be the eyes and ears of the American taxpayer inside the government's animal laboratories. Through cutting-edge, campaign-style techniques in research, advertising and lobbying, we're laying the groundwork for an unprecedented issue advocacy and public affairs effort. And we're forging a grassroots army to raily politicians and bureaucrats to ultimately de-fund and roll back forced taxpayer-funded animal experimentation.

We have a number of incremental steps and goals. For example, the [National Institutes of Health] should be opening its books and the National Institute on Drug Abuse should be immediately audited and investigated by Congress.

Look, \$12 billion tax dollars per year for animal experiments is simply the floor, not the ceiling of the government's animal experimentation budget. It's just what the NIH publicly admits to (and doesn't even include EPA, USDA,

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Pentagon and other government agency spending).

The federal budget is a nightmare so we have to jump through hoops to FOIA these bureaucrats because there's no transparency here. We think taxpayers have a right to know how their money is being spent.

But there's a bigger picture here: we also want to provide a voice for centrist, mainstream and conservative audiences, by speaking to fiscal responsibility in animal protection. We want to enlarge the coalition and redefine animal advocacy by bringing new blood into the movement. We bring a fresh, innovative line of attack that reframes a 150-year-old debate for new audiences. This is uncharted territory.

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#### Have there been any victories so far?

Right now, we're developing the very first campaign-style, public affairs advertising campaign for television, print and digital channels on this issue. We just cut our first spot this summer and have a handful of other hard-hitting ads planned. We're also in the middle of a long-term, investigative research project that we think will rattle a few cages in 2015!

#### What is the group's makeup? How are you funded?

We're a bipartisan mix of Republicans, Democrats, libertarians and populists. We're political consultants and public affairs professionals. We're advertising executives with experience ranging from Madison Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue. We're campaign warriors. We're doctors and scientists too.

But most importantly we're all new blood. We're largely outsiders to the old animal movement. That's the common denominator that binds us. That, and of course, the principle that we don't think taxpayers should be forced to pay for painful, wasteful and unnecessary animal experiments.

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It's truly become a grassroots movement. We are organized as a nonprofit and we're funded entirely by donations from the public. All contributions to White Coat Waste are fully tax-deductible. Unlike the animal experimenters, we can't rely on handouts from the government!

### What's your strategy?

The strategy is simple: drain the swamp. Because when the tax dollars are gone, the animal abusers are gone. We think White Coat Waste can save these animals and a lot of tax money through enforcing fiscal discipline in government and cutting wasteful spending.

Tactically, we want to clean up the government's waste and hold the animal abusers accountable through a three-step, campaign-style approach:

 Identify the Waste: follow the money through research, investigation and analysis of

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taxpayer-funded animal experiments.

 Expose the Waste: permanent advertising to raise awareness and raily a new

generation of taxpayers against animal experiments.

 De-fund the Waste: grassroots activation, lobbying and coalition building with animal lovers, fiscal hawks and other taxpayer watchdogs.

Do you think that all animal experimentation is wrong or is some OK?
When is it OK?

White Coat Waste is very clear about this: We only fight animal experiments that are funded by taxpayers, it's not that private sector animal abuse is OK. It's just that the biggest funder of experimentation on animals isn't big cosmetic companies or big pharmaceutical companies. It's big government.

So that's why we point the tip of our spear at wasteful spending. With the doubling of the National Institutes of Health's budget last decade, government has become the market maker for animal experimentation. So we understand that spending isn't the solution here; it's the problem. That's our focus, And it will continue to be our focus.

Is all taxpayer-funded everything wrong? If not, what do you think it's appropriate to spend taxpayer money on?

We're not against taxpayer-funded everything. But we are certainly against taxpayer-funded experimentation on animals; this is not the proper role or responsibility of government. It's also an immense money pit of waste, fraud and abuse.

In reality, every dollar the feds spend on this senseless waste and abuse is one dollar less for disaster relief, education, air traffic controllers, national defense or any number of other worthy programs. So take your pick; virtually anything is better than what we're spending it on now.

This issue is winnable. White Coat Waste's team spent a great deal of time in 2014 laying the groundwork for this campaign and that meant studying the polls and focus groups.

Here are the facts: public opinion is moving in our favor. The number of people who think that animal experimentation is "medically necessary" has fallen 20 points in 20 years. And between 2000-2008, overall support for animal experiments dropped 16 points in public opinion polis. In my business, that's not a bleed; that's a hemorrhage.

We're on offense. The "White Coats" are on defense. So it's going to be an exciting 2015.

Do you yourself have any pets?

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Ha, well, I don't have any pets right at this moment. But I've had animals most of my life. Dogs, cats, turtles, fish, even mice and Norwegian fancy rats.

One day, I'd like to adopt a beagle who was rescued from an animal experimentation laboratory. I travel a lot these days so I'm not well suited to care for a special-needs dog at the moment. But hopefully one dayl

This interview has been edited for length.

Find out more about White Coat Waste on the group's Facebook page.

And get in touch with HuffPost's animal welfare editor at arin.greenwood@huffingtonpost.com if you have an animal story to share!

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